

## *Tattoos*

“... and all happiness is a chance encounter and at every moment stands besides you like a beggar by the roadside...”  
André Gide. "Fruits of the Earth", book one

The key word is exactly that: time. The engraved work, recently printed, already has the fascination of history. It is silent, intimate, ordinary. It immediately sets up a connection with the spectator: the printed image recalls memories of childhood, the books that encroach on sleepless night by populating the room with images. Complicity arising out of the gouging, incisions, and ink. More than ever it is a human hand, constructive, skilful at weaving the threads, the web, in a weft that includes fragments, pieces, moments.

Time is exactly that: the print. There is no room here for the immediate, for speed, for extroversion. Rather, in print the pleasure of the image comes from corrosion, from absence of matter, grooves penetrated by the ink. This struggle to overcome harsh material, penetrating the armour, the plate, and giving it another history, occurs through a slow process in which each stage requires patience, insight. It demands time. Polishing, cleaning, heating, inking, making. The artist is always bent over the work, lightly passing her hand over the worked surface, caressing the skin, a tattooed landscape, feeling the texture, the porosity. Artisan and artist come together in this craft. How can it be accurately determined when one is acting, when the other is operating, particularly when they inhabit the same body? How many beggars did we come across this morning?

Print is exactly that: action. The act occurs in front of my eyes. The hand, blind, follows its impulses. It is cookery, torture, the clear sexuality of its intermediations. The image emerges, and develops, through that history. “Sometimes I look in the past for some handful of memories that can tell me a story, but I get lost and my life overflows with recollections. It seems

that I just live in a moment that is always new" (1). It is that image which restores the past to find itself in the present, that ambiguity of childlike form linked to an adult reasoning in spatial orientation, that childlike perversity accompanying adult lyricism, which are what attract me to the intaglio prints by the Rio Grande do Sul artist Maria Lucia Cattani. Simple and complex, the earlier forms, which were more related to drawing, now break free of their constraints dictated by line to become gestural in broad brushstrokes whose chromatic variations reveal all the richness of the textures the plate acquires through the successive stages, successive moments, imposed on it by the artist.

Action is precisely that: generation. Printmaking's clear tendency towards subtlety, to a kind of internalisation, to a musicality inclined more to delicate harmony than discord, is not always in step with the spirit of the age, more open, libertarian, full of fanfare, believing in the seductive power of gesture and colour, to thus be able to come closer to people. The artist cannot escape the baggage she carries from the tradition of one of the most important centres of printmaking in the country, whose realist heritage still affects most of the local producers of art to this day. Cattani has however opted for more direct references, for the formal repertoire of her generation, for commitment to the destructively libertarian aesthetic of this age. Her line is consciously ironic, deliberately feigning hesitancy. But it is measured and accurate. The work adopts the influence of pop, the aesthetics of the cartoon. Yet abstraction is imposed absolutely, now principally with broad brushstrokes, which brings her close to the print experiments of her compatriot, Iberê Camargo. In the end, Cattani's works reveal a clear identification with the aesthetics of the urban, with walls, and certain relationships with maps. If in her early works the artist approached printmaking with objectives related to form and space, in work that was primarily graphic and therefore close to drawing, in the recent editions we can see a more engaged relationship with the material, with brushstroke and colour, something that clearly brings her closer to specifically painterly investigations. Abandoning introspection, the work now appears more

operatic, more theatrical, bolder and - why not? - happier. Constantly evolving, it increasingly asserts its place in the panorama of contemporary. Its web, its fabric, its weave, camouflages, shine through the skin on which the image is fixed like a tattoo.

(1) André Gide. "Fruits of the Earth", book eight.

Marcus de Lontra Costa

1986